NOTICE: STATE'S PLAN FOR USE OF FEDERAL CHAFEE FOSTER CARE INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM FY 2000 FUNDS

DHS invites comments on its planned use of FY 2000 Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) funds.

The FY 2000 CFCIP funding allocation for Hawaii represents a significant federal funding increase from \$17,834 in FY 1999 to \$500,000, and provides an opportunity for Hawaii to expand and improve services to help foster youths and former foster youths, up to age 21, prepare, take responsibility for and manage their transition to adult self-sufficiency. The State has until September 30, 2001 to spend the funds once it is received.

Hawaii's Children in Foster Care:

- There were 3,180 children in foster care under DHS Child Welfare Services (CWS) placement responsibility in the 6-month period from October 1999 to March 2000.
- 1,009 were between the age of 12 and 18.
- 439 were between the age of 16 and 18.
- 24% (104) of the foster youths between the age of 16 and 18 had a diagnosed disability.
 Most (66) were diagnosed emotionally disturbed.
- During this 6-month period, 61 emancipated youths aged out of foster care.
- Every year an estimated 100 (+) youths age out with the expectation that, as adults, they will be able to live self-sufficiently.
- This year 66 are anticipated to complete basic education (get a GED) or graduate from high school.

What Youth Need

In March this year, DHS brought together current and former foster youths, ages 16 – 22, for a statewide independent living teen conference. Facilitators from the National Resource Center for Youth Development (NRCYD) helped the youth to focus on the question: "For youth and adults

who work with youths the transition to adulthood can sometimes be a difficult one, what can we do together to make the transition easier and successful?"

In April, the Hawaii Youth Services Network (HYSN - note: HYSN is Hawaii's Transitional Living Program for Homeless Youth grantee) and the Casey Family Program helped DHS by convening a meeting of service providers, the Hawaii Foster Parent Association (HFPA), housing/homeless services and employment services (Workforce Investment Act) agencies, the State Office of Youth Services (OYS), the Hawaii Community Foundation (HCF), community representatives and DHS to similarly focus on the question "what can we do together to make the transition easier and successful?"

What we learned about what foster youth need:

A BASIC EDUCATION

Nationally, approximately 75% of the youth who age out of foster care every year do so without either a GED or high school diploma.

Nationally, foster children drop out from school at twice the rate of other children (1997 study). Researchers generally attribute this greater risk to repeated transfers from one foster home to the next, where valuable credits, school records and social networks are lost and curriculums and standards differ. Further, foster children are estimated to lose 6 months of emotional development with each new placement.

The national Westat study found that completing high school prior to leaving foster care was related to stable employment, not being a cost to the community, and overall self-sufficiency.

Consider: How can we connect foster youths with educational supports and improve linkage with the Department of Education (DOE); better utilize the DOE Comprehensive Student Support System (CSSS) to improve educational outcomes for high risk and special needs youth? Rewards/incentives for school completion?

A PLACE TO LIVE

A national survey found that 25 – 40% of youth who had been in foster care would become homeless, and that 27% of the homeless population had a history of being in foster care, group care or institutional care.

Consider: How can we improve collaboration between child welfare and housing assistance programs?

A JOB TO SUPPORT THEMSELVES

Studies have shown that 2 to 4 years after youth age out of foster care 62% have not held a job for 1 year, and 66% were receiving public assistance.

A national study revealed that youths who held at least 1 job during their stay in foster care were more likely to maintain a job after exit from care.

Consider: How can we create strong partnerships among businesses, schools, job training programs and child welfare to enhance job skills, basic life skills and work opportunities for youth in care? With local Workforce Investment Boards and their Youth Councils?

❖ SUPPORT FROM SOMEONE THEY CAN COUNT ON

Every year more than a 100 of Hawaii's youth age out of foster care... many without any permanent family connection.

The need for familial ties and support is strong ...there is a pattern of teens exiting the foster care system returning to their biological families.

Consider: How can we ensure that every foster youth has a permanent connection to a significant adult (adult mentor) when they leave care?

Listening to Our Customers, Using CFCIP Funds to Expand and Improve Services

Current Effort

The mission of the CWS Independent Living (IL) Program is to assist and support foster youths, age 12 – 18, to prepare, take personal responsibility for and manage their transition to adult self-sufficiency.

In addition, CWS provides supervised transitional living apartments for former foster youths, up to age 19 and financial room and board help, up to age 21, for those pursuing (attending) post-secondary training and education.

Existing program design and service delivery features:

Independent Living Services Delivered by Private Contractors Statewide

To support CWS in its mission, IL services are delivered by private contract providers in all political subdivisions statewide: Hawaii County (East Hawaii and West Hawaii regions), Kauai County, Maui County, and the City and County of Honolulu (Island of Oahu).

These services are designed to serve foster youths between age 12 and 18 under CWS placement responsibility and youths between age 18 and 19 formerly under CWS placement responsibility who voluntarily choose or agree to participate in the program.

IL services include:

- ✓ Development of written, individualized independent living plans or agreements with the youth, CWS case manager, foster parents and biological parents, when appropriate, geared towards the youth's level of maturation.
- ✓ For youths, age 12 15, the focus of the plan is on age- and developmentally- appropriate life skills (on skill development for responsible decision-making, planning/goal setting, communication, self-identity/esteem building, problem solving, and emotional/psychological/spiritual wellbeing).
- ✓ Employment of team approach in working with youths involvement of CWS case worker, foster parents, community resources (educational, vocational, etc.).
- ✓ Counseling and support services.
- ✓ Continued life skills development and reinforcement.
- ✓ Development of daily living skills (home management skills, responsible shopping skills, utilization of existing community resources, health and hygiene, money management).
- ✓ Employment assistance job readiness and job search help.
- ✓ Transitional supervised living arrangements (staffed or supervised apartments) for former foster youths, age18 19, which allows for learning/teaching opportunities as youths make decisions, practice life and daily living skills, and experience the consequences of their choices and actions in a safe environment.

- Financial Room and Board Help for Former Foster Youths, Up to Age 21, Pursuing Post-secondary Training and Education
 - (A) Foster Board Allowance Incentive for Higher Education (For eligible CWS foster youths after reaching the age of majority, but not older than 21, and who attend an accredited institution of higher learning)

CWS provides a maximum \$529 monthly foster board allowance incentive for eligible CWS foster youths after reaching the age of majority provided that:

- (1) the youth is not older than 21
- (2) is attending an accredited institution of higher learning on a full-time basis, or on a part-time basis for the first academic year if approved by the DHS director, and (emphasis added)
- (3) continues to reside in the foster home wherein the youth reached the age of majority, or continues to be accepted as a member of the foster family and is under the guidance and support of the foster family.

In addition to the above conditions, to be considered eligible, the youth, by law, must have been placed into foster care by the family court pursuant to Chapter 587, Hawaii Revised Statute.

Examples of institutions of higher learning, according to written CWS procedures, are community colleges, 4-year universities or colleges, private business schools, vocational schools specializing in specific skill areas such as beauty/cosmetology, electronics, cooking, etc.

In accordance with state law, the foster board allowance must be paid to either an accredited institution of higher learning or to the youth's foster parents.

Written CWS procedures further state that participating youths must apply for financial aid at the school they plan to attend. Most institutions of higher education will consider a foster youth to be without parental support, thus qualifying the youth for an array of financial aid resources. The written procedures instruct workers to consider the amount of financial assistance provided through scholarships, etc., in determining payment adjustments. CWS is reviewing this and other policies for strategic coherence.

(B) Permanency Assistance Payment Incentive for Higher Education

(For youths between age 18 and 21, who were under CWS placement responsibility at the time that permanent custody or legal guardianship was awarded, and who attend an accredited institution of higher education on a full-time basis)

Requirements are found in written CWS procedures and payment is to the permanent custodian or legal guardian of the youth prior to the youth reaching the age of majority.

Planned Improvements – State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2001

Expand contracted IL services statewide

Double funding for contracted IL services from \$413,999 in SFY 2000 to \$800,000 in SFY 2001:

- to improve and expand private sector capacity to provide/access financial, housing, counseling, employment, education and other appropriate services and supports (including personal and emotional support from someone they can count on - a "mentor") for youths between age 18 and 21 formerly under CWS placement responsibility
- to improve and expand services and supports for foster youths under CWS placement responsibility, age 12 – 18
- to test incentive/reward strategies to engage and motivate youths, reinforce skill development, youth accomplishments and progression to adult self-sufficiency.

Condition receipt of financial room and board assistance for higher education to personal responsibility agreement, with transitional IL services and supports provided to help former foster youths succeed.

Financial assistance is not enough to ensure attendance or completion for many former foster youths who lack the discipline or find it difficult to stay the course. Experience has shown a pattern of dropout.

DHS is working on a policy change to have former foster youths enter into a personal responsibility agreement as a condition for receiving financial room and board assistance for higher education, with transitional IL services and supports provided to help them succeed.

• Training

Use Title IV-E training funds to help case workers, service providers, foster parents, adoptive families, partnering agencies and the community understand and address the issues confronting adolescents preparing for independent living.

Strengthen IL Program Coordination and Private/Public Linkages

Establish or contract for IL program coordination services and staff support for the Youth Advisory Board (YAB). YAB is Hawaii's forum for foster youth and former foster youth participation in promoting understanding of issues affecting kids in foster care and their transition and readiness for adult self-sufficiency, and for peer support.

In partnership with HYSN, the Casey Family Program and OYS, continue to involve interested parties in:

- (1) data collection and defining the data development agenda
- (2) developing incentive/reward strategies for improved outcomes e.g., use of individual development accounts (IDAs) as a savings incentive
- (3) strengthened linkages with employment, education, housing and private foundations, like the Geist Foundation.

Inquiries and written comments regarding the proposed plan may be directed, by July 19, 2000, to:

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